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Killing Girl

A Girl to Die For

Before she was a killer, she was a prostitute. But who and what she was before that... ahh, *there's* a story just waiting to be told. And that's just what *Glen Brunswick* and *Frank Espinosa* intend to in their new Image Comics series ***Killing Girl.***

Brunswick, screenwriter of ***Frequency*** and other films, is no stranger to comics: his first work in the medium was ***Gray Area,*** co-produced with *John Romita Jr.*. While that series was built around a dark fantasy theme, ***Killing Girl*** is a crime-suspense tale with an intriguing twist.

"It's a 'What If' scenario beginning with the idea that the Mafia is actually running their own branch of the secret service," Brunswick said. "During the 1980's, the mob is being eaten alive. They've lost the bulk of their heavy-hitters to long-term incarceration or witness protection programs. The RICO statute has enabled the government to largely dismantle their criminal network

"But the CIA is facing problems of their own. Heavy budget reductions have whittled away the Agency's ability to continue it's domestic operations division. The CIA offers a deal to what's left of the remaining five families. The government will publically declare they've won the war on crime and only occasionally prosecute a few 'High Profile' gangsters. In return, the Mafia will operate as a covert killing machine to eliminate CIA directed targets. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Russian mob links up with the Cosa Nostra secret service as well. Then, the organization becomes truly global in scope."

Brunswick's story is a bit less global and a bit more personal, however. "Our window into this world is a nineteen year-old girl named Sara. She is the killing girl. She's the best trigger that the Mafia's got. The more difficult the job, the better she likes it. She takes a certain pride in a well executed kill.

"Sara has endured a horrendous upbringing. At three years of age she is stolen from her family. Later, she is forced into prostitution. After she kills a client in self-defense she is finally offered a way out. Her Capo gives her the opportunity to enter the assassination training program. For Sara the decision is a no-brainer. She looks at her job as if she's killing people that are already dead. They just don't know it yet. It makes sense if you think about it. Anytime she is unavailable to do a hit, someone else is brought in. Then, that target turns up dead anyway.

"Some days Sara fantasizes about what her life would be like if she had a real family. But most days she so busy she doesn't have time to think about it. She's in love with her boss, a top Mafia Capo. It's seem that the more efficient at killing she becomes the more attention he lavishes upon her.

"Her saving grace is that she is someone who is truly motivated by love. This may be the single trait that could redeem her. When she discovers that she has a real sister and a family it sets her off on a journey of discovery that might return her to humanity. In time, if we are patient, she may actually even be worthy of our empathy."

Just how complicated is Sara's backstory? "Well, I don't want to give *too* much away about what has happened to her yet. I mean, I could tell you... but then I'd have to shoot you. And, then I'd have to shoot anyone who's reading this article. And there are only so many hours in each day. Did I mention I have two kids?

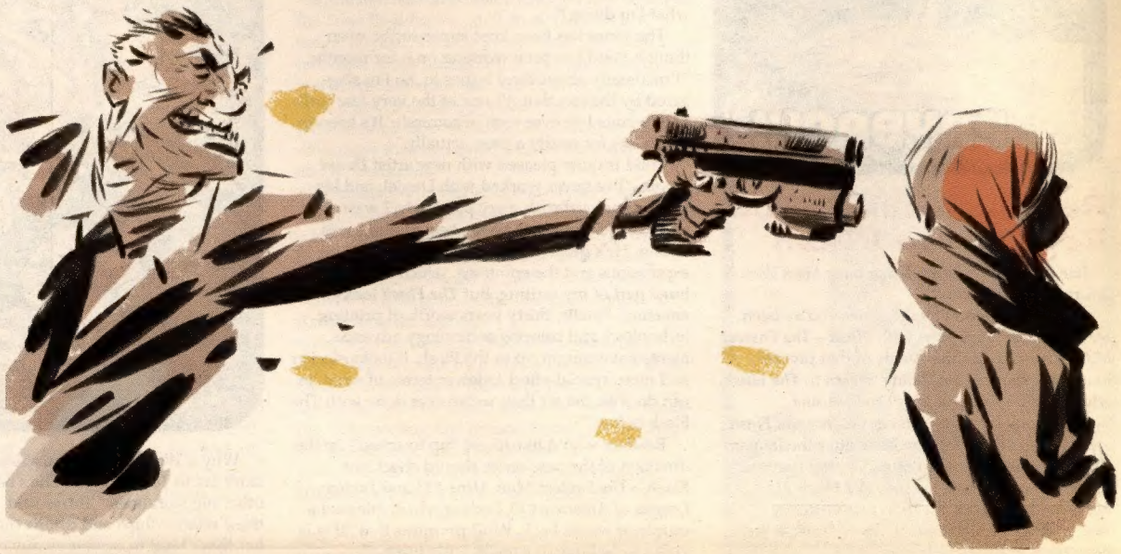
"I *will* tell you that Sara's current assignment, by sheer coincidence, puts her in a position to cross paths with her long lost family. This is the inciting incident that will change the current direction of Sara's life. It causes her to reexamine why she does what she does. And it gives her a window into the extraordinary child that she was. It allows her the opportunity to consider who she might have become if only her fate had been different."

Some aspects of ***Killing Girl*** seem reminiscent of such cult favorite series as ***La Femme Nikita*** and ***Alias,*** albeit with a more murderous twist. "I think those are reasonable comparisons," Brunswick said. "Of course the book will be compared to similar ideas that came before. My desire is that once you get past the comparisons that you'll come to see this book as a fresh take on the Mafia assassin concept.

"Also, I really worked hard at creating a *real* character thrust into an extraordinary circumstance. I wanted her motivations to be completely justified. I hate when a character acts a certain way because the plot of the story demands it. She speaks to me as a fully fleshed-out character. And my hope is that she'll find an audience that feels the same way I do."

While the concept sounds tailor-made for a major motion picture, "it was always my intention to have it be a comic book," Brunswick said. "I've been working on the book for a couple of years, but I had a few minor distractions. My wife gave birth to our second boy. Also, I had to spend a longer than expected period working on a screenplay for New Line Cinema—it's the live-action adaptation of *Brian K. Vaughan and Tony Harris'* ***Ex Machina***.

"I really got the bug for doing comics a few years back on ***Gray Area*** with *John Romita Jr.* John's not only an incredible talent but he's one of the greatest people I've had the pleasure to know. It truly was a wonderful introduction to the world of comic book creation working alongside him on a regular basis. I promised myself I'd get back to doing comics again just as soon as I could."



This time around, he's joining forces with artist *Frank Espinosa,* best known for his stylish work on ***Rocketo.*** "When I saw the previews for Frank's Eisner nominated book ***Rocketo,*** I had a hunch it was going to be very special. I called him up even before issue one hit the stands. We had lunch and he brought along this sketch book with some of the most beautiful work I have ever seen. He is such a unique talent! I couldn't understand how ***Rocketo*** could be his first book when his artwork was as mature as it is.

"Anyway, I pitched him ***Killing Girl,*** and I think initially he was concerned about doing a darker book. But a few days later he called me up and said he'd done a drawing of some guy's head exploding and it's wasn't as bad as he thought. Turns out Frank is *extremely* corruptible," Brunswick said with a laugh.

Espinosa's fluid, minimalist style may seem an odd fit for this sort of book, but Brunswick is quite pleased with the style that Espinosa has developed for ***Killing Girl.*** "We talked about the look of the book having a film noir sensibility—kind of a retro feel in a modern world. But I really can't take much credit for any more than that," he said. "Frank's goal was to channel *Chester Gould* doing his version of ***La Femme Nikita.*** I have to say that I feel truly blessed to be working with him. The art comes in and it's just so far above anything I'd imagined. He blows my mind with everything he draws. As a writer, there is just no better situation to be in."

Brunswick knew from the very beginning that he didn't want this to look like a typical "bad girl" book. "Aren't you tired of seeing the same old stuff? I know I am. Frank has this slick animation style that is clearly quite different from the highly illustrated photo-realistic books that seem to currently dominate the marketplace. It's the reason I was so attracted to his work. I really wanted the look of the book to stand apart from the crowd. The presentation he came up with really feels fresh to me. As a creator, I consider that pretty darn exciting!"

Rather than commit to an ongoing series right off the bat, Brunswick wanted to deliver a tightly-plotted finite series that would introduce readers to Sara and her world. "The miniseries is five issues. If it does well, I have another story arc I'd really like to do," Brunswick said, adding that" I could actually really write her for a while. I've been having a lot of fun with her!"

Brunswick has no worries about the series running late. "Frank is a speed demon! ***Rocketo*** is a monthly thirty-two page book that he pencils, inks, and colors himself. I don't think he has ever been late with a deadline. People are constantly reminding him to eat and sleep. I believe he is currently working on the second ***Rocketo*** arc. I'm sure it will be out shortly."

Killing Girl is the latest of many comics projects that Brunswick hopes to develop in the near future. "I've been discussing a possible sequel to ***Gray Area*** with *John Romita Jr.* It offers a really neat window into the conspiracy theory behind the Kennedy assassination.

"I also have a graphic novel that needs the right artist. It's about a guy who gets haunted by his dead ex-girlfriend. She's disgusted with him because he's unable to go on and live his life without her. I really would like to get to this one soon."

For right now, though, Brunswick has this really *killer* concept that's occupying his time...

Killing Girl #1, a $2.99 comic from Image, is scheduled for early August release.

by Cliff Biggers

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

Re-Mark-able: Waid Returns to Flash

Just revel in the news, ***Flash*** fans: *Mark Waid* is returning to the series!

Of course, it won't be the series you've been reading... that one ended with ***Flash—The Fastest Man Alive #13***. But the events of that pivotal issue pave the way for Waid's return to ***The Flash***, which will be illustrated by *Daniel Acuna*.

Don't look for a new first issue, though: ***Flash*** will pick up with #231, the issue after the January 2006 finale of the series. Before you get that issue, though, you'll be able to enjoy ***All Flash #1***, a Waid-written special that will feature art by Acuna as well as *Karl Kershl, Shane Davis, & Joe Bennett*.

So *which* Flash is Waid writing? He's not saying... but he assures readers that the series won't be "just a return to stuff I've done before. A lot off that is because, you know, the characters I'm returning to are different," Waid told ***Comic Shop Newsarama's*** *Vaneta Rogers*.

Readers will get a more complete view of the direction of the new series in ***All-Flash #1***, which is "sort of a retrospective of the Flash legacy over the years and how it's extended all the way back from Jay and all the way to Bart. And maybe beyond. So, that's the comic book reason why we're doing ***All-Flash***. And another reason is that, by the time we locked down the artist for the new series, we needed an issue in between in a hurry. So ***All-Flash*** was born that day when we realized we didn't want to rush the guy who was doing the ongoing series, but he can't finish by the date we need. So what can we do that helps bridge the link between the *Marc Guggenheim* series and what I'm doing?"

The series has been kept super-secret, even though Waid has been working on it for months. "I'm already about three issues in. So I'm staggered by the fact that it's one of the very few well-kept secrets I've ever seen in comics!... It's been in the works for nearly a year, actually."

Waid is quite pleased with new artist *Daniel Acuna*. "I've never worked with Daniel, and his style is very airbrush, very painter-ly. I wasn't sure we were going to be the best fit, but I was wrong. He's great at not only capturing the expressions and the emotions, which is always a huge part of my writing, but ***The Flash*** looks amazing. Finally, thirty years worth of printing technology and coloring technology advancements have caught up to the Flash. It looks sleeker and more special-effect-laden in terms of what he can do with the art than we've ever done with The Flash before."

Readers who'd like to get "up to speed" on the direction of the new series should check out ***Flash—The Fastest Man Alive #13*** and ***Justice League of America #10***, both of which released a couple of weeks back. Waid promises that "this is going to be huge. It's really, truly huge..."

Look for ***All-Flash #1*** in July, with ***Flash #231*** following in August.

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A Wonder-ful Miniseries

More than a decade after her introduction, the current incarnation of Wonder Girl is returning to the spotlight—not as a member of a super-team, however, but as a solo star in her own miniseries, ***Wonder Girl***, produced by *J. Torres & Sanford Greene*.

Torres told ***Comic Shop Newsarama's*** *J. Caleb Mozzocco* the focus of Cassie Sandsmark's first solo series. "She's been through a lot in the last year or so and we get to bring it all together in this mini," Torres said. "She's cleaning up after the Amazons, she gets roped into some ***Countdown*** related stuff, and all at the same time wrestling with her own demons…when she's not wrestling chimera and hydra and other demigods."

Wonder Girl *has* had a pretty rough year, and has exhibited some pretty erratic behavior since ***Infinite Crisis***—such as joining a cult devoted to resurrecting her dead boyfriend, for example. Has she accepted what happened to Superboy, and whether or not she belongs with the Teen Titans? "Well, without spoiling other peoples' upcoming stories, let's just say that we'll see her moving on a bit," Torres said, "but things in that department get more complicated before they're resolved. We're talking about teenage drama, after all. It's not easy getting over your first love under any circumstances.

"Cassie's got issues and we'll see her work through them in ***Wonder Girl***, as well as *Sean McKeever's* ***Teen Titans***. Both Sean and I are inheriting some plots and story elements from other writers and books and we're trying to respect what they set up but at the same try out some new stuff. He's also been very gracious about letting me run with this ball and coordinating things with his plans for Titans.

Why a ***Wonder Girl*** miniseries rather than a story arc in ***Teen Titans?*** "She's been in all these other big storylines," Torres said, "and has all of these relationships and drama that's happened to her that's hard to contain in any one book not exclusively about her or give her the attention she deserves or needs to fully tell her story."

Will any of her super-powered friends make a guest appearance? "Yes, friends like Wonder Woman and one or two Titans will definitely show up. But even though this is Wonder Girl's book, a lot of other cool characters will be there to either challenge her or help her."

Wonder Girl #1 is slated for September release.

Amazing, Amazing, Amazing News

Sensational Spider-Man and ***Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man*** will both come to an end after the conclusion of the ***Spider-Man: One More Day*** arc. But that doesn't mean that Marvel will offer only one Spidey comic each month: instead, they're promoting ***Amazing Spider-Man*** to a three-issues-a-month schedule, supervised by editor *Steve Wacker*.

Wacker, editor of DC's weekly series ***52*** before he moved to Marvel, has plenty of experience managing the creative demands involved in multiple-issues-each-month production... but he said that his experience on ***52*** had little to do with this Spidey change. "This idea of upping the frequency on ***Amazing Spider-Man*** predates me or ***52*** (and as most everyone knows, it's pretty much how the Superman books were run from the late '80s to mid '90s). From what I understand, implementing this plan on ***Spidey*** began getting talked about a few years back. Apparently it didn't get too far beyond a suggestion since people were so happy with JMS on the main book. So the idea sort of simmered for awhile. With the creative change on ***Amazing*** [following the departure of *J. Michael Straczynski*], I suppose it just seemed like the right time to give it a shot."

Wacker points out that the changes won't call for a larger investment from Spidey fans. "We already have three Spider-Man monthlies, so the page amount is the same if you're reading all the Spidey books already..."

While Wacker didn't reveal who'd be doing the creative honors on the series, he did say that "the new creators have laid out about a year's worth of story arcs for Peter Parker and the cast. Over that, they're coming up with stories that will move the uber-plot along, so that each story has the same writing and art team and no one is left writing part three of some else's story.

"In other words... it's not the same way ***52*** was set up with everyone essentially working on every issue... This is such a different creative set-up—and Marvel makes books so differently that I'm not sure if my prior experience [on ***52***] helps or not."

What's the biggest difference creatively? "Here's one difference: the ***52*** gang pretty much already knew each other by time I got involved. The new ***Spider-Man*** writers were all pretty much strangers, I believe. Not sure if one's *better* than the other, but it's *different*."

Wacker said that ultimately, it was the readership who sold him on the idea. "I was skeptical, but the numbers bear it out that ***Amazing*** is the 'main' book to most readers and the feeling is that the important Spider-man stuff happens between its covers. Certainly history backs that up too, from ***Peter Parker*** to ***Team-Up*** to ***Web of...*** No matter how good the creators and stories might be on the supporting books, when forced to choose, most readers lean towards ***Amazing***."

What's the upside of this change? "Speaking for me, the best part is more room for Peter Parker. Everyone involved in the new stuff feels that this is really Peter's story, not Spider-Man. Seems like a crazy distinction, but it's really the secret to the character. We could go an entire issue without seeing Spider-Man and I'm not sure anyone would notice. With the increased frequency, we'll get to see more of him and still get plenty of Spider-Man..."

As far as the as-yet-unnamed creators, Wacker *did* say that "I'm getting to work with a slew of Marvel's best artists (who we'll announce later, impatient ones). Like Batman, Spider-Man is such a great character to interpret and the creation lends itself to a vast variety of styles. I like comics for the constant variations in flavors I can get in any one month. This is going to scratch that itch for me a lot."

Marvel's Next X-Over

Marvel's mutant titles, long overdue for a major crossover storyline, are about to get just that. Once the serialized bonus story "Endangered Species" wraps up, X-Men fans can look forward to ***X-Men: Messiah Complex***.

Editor *Nick Lowe* explained the premise of ***Messiah Complex***. "***House of M*** changed everything. Wanda's 'No More Mutants' spell made homo superior an endangered species and set a

lot in motion. The 'Endangered Species' one shot and back-ups crystallize what this has done to mutants.

"*Messiah Complex*, however, is the climax we've been building to since those dreadful three words were uttered. It's huge. It's dark. It's intense. It will put the cap on the last two years of stories and set the stage for the next several years.

"Our checklist looks like this:

- Chapter 1: ***X-Men: Messiah Complex One Shot***
- Chapter 2: ***Uncanny X-Men #492***
- Chapter 3: ***X-Factor #25***
- Chapter 4: ***New X-Men #4***
- Chapter 5: ***X-Men #206***
- Chapter 6: ***Uncanny X-Men #493***
- Chapter 7: ***X-Factor #26***
- Chapter 8: ***New X-Men #45***
- Chapter 9: ***X-Men #207***
- Chapter 10: ***Uncanny X-Men #494***
- Chapter 11: ***X-Factor #27***
- Chapter 12: ***New X-Men #46***
- Chapter 13: ***X-Men #208***

"All the writers of the regular books are writing their chapters," Lowe said, while the one-shot is produced by "*Ed Brubaker* and—drumroll please—*Marc Silvestri*. We've started seeing Marc's pages and they are phenomenal. They show why he's one of the best X-Men artists ever."

While Lowe didn't want to give too much of the story away, he said that "something happens in Chapter One that changes everything. It stratifies the world of the X-Men in a clear way. It unifies the heroes in a way they haven't been for years, and all under Scott Summers. Cyclops steps up huge in this event and will get people talking...

"There will be a significant and final shift in the status quo and even with how people look at mutants. Also, coming out of the event, readers will have a more clear idea of what the X-Men are and what every book means. Gone will be the days where readers will be confused what book is which and what the difference is."

Look for ***Messiah Complex*** to begin in October.

CSNsider

•The folks at Dynamite are going back to press with a second printing of ***The Boys #7***, as well as a second printing of ***The Boys Volume One TP***, which collects the first six issues. Publisher *Nick Barrucci* told ***CSN*** that Dynamite hopes to keep issues of ***The Boys*** in print until they're collected in trade paperback in order to make it easy for readers to get up to speed on the *Garth Ennis-Darick Robertson* storyline.

•*Dwayne McDuffie*, currently helming the adventures of Marvel's ***Fantastic Four***, is taking over as writer of ***Justice League of America*** with #13, the first post-*Brad Meltzer* issue. "He's one of the best comic writers out there who's not writing many comics, and I'm glad we've got him writing for us right now," *Dan DiDio* said. As for what changes readers might see under McDuffie, DiDio said that "we're going to shift the team a little, partly because the team that Brad set up is a huge cast, because Brad wanted to work with a lot of characters. So, we're looking to bring things down to a more manageable size, we're going to bring other members in also, and bring in that sense of high action and high adventure again—bring the big scale feel back in to the book... The first thing Dwayne's doing for us is the ***Justice League Wedding Special***, which will set the proper tone, as the Special introduces the villains that will play into Dwayne's run: the Injustice League."

•A hardcover version of ***The Killing Joke***, with additional material, is on the 2008 schedule.

•Artist *Shane Davis*, newly exclusive to DC, will show up later this year in ***Superman/Batman***, where he'll illustrate a kryptonite-focused arc written by ***Heroes*** scribe *Michael Green*.

•*Steve Niles & Scott Hampton* are working on a new series, ***Simon Dark***, that Niles describes as the story of a Gotham City street urchin who doesn't know who—or what—he is. When he's gunned down and doesn't die, it's discovered that he's made up of at least thirty different people.

•When asked if there was any chance the "original" Legion members would return to ***Supergirl & the Legion of Super-Heroes***, *Dan DiDio* said that the Legion members featured in the JLA/JSA "Lightning Saga" will appear in an upcoming issue of ***Action Comics***, while the regular Legion series will continue—but he said that all will be made clear in upcoming months.

•Readers can look forward to a series of ***Countdown Presents*** projects, written by *Ron Marz*, exploring the various worlds of the DC multiverse. ***Countdown Presents***, which kicks off with ***The Search for Ray Palmer***, will showcase various multiverses that were seen both in the final issue of ***52***, as well as new, as yet unexplored Earths populated by different versions of the DC characters, as well as the Charlton heroes and others. The stars of the books will be the Challengers of the Beyond, a team comprised of Donna Troy, Kyle Rayner, and Jason Todd. "We'll put them in situations and settings you never thought you'd see in a 'real' DC book," writer *Ron Marz* said, adding that he's pleased to get the chance to write Kyle's adventures once again. Editor *Mike Carlin* added that readers could expect to see everything from "the Crime Syndicate world to the Red Son world" in these books.

•*Peter David* has been tapped as writer of ***She-Hulk 2*** following *Dan Slott's* departure. David faced some challenges once he agreed to take over the series. "I know some very basic aspects of what her status quo will be, but none of the details or story elements. Indeed, that made it slightly problematic for my first issue. I couldn't just flow organically out of the previous issue because at the point at which I wrote it, there were no scripts for the issues right before it (or if there were, I sure didn't have them.) I solved the problem by setting my first issue three months after the end of the previous one. There have been story developments that have left Jen in a very different place. But they're only alluded to to start out. Once I've actually had a chance to read the issues that come right before, I can then go back and write flashback issues that fill in the gap."

One definite change is occupational. "She won't be directly involved with GLK&H; instead she's going to be attached to a related business concern. And she won't be lawyering..."

David is pleased with the new assignment. "She-Hulk has the potential to be our Wonder Woman. A powerful female with a strong moral center and a determination to do what's right. She's also a unique combination of brains and brawn. The ideal She-Hulk story is one that plays on both aspects of her make-up, the intelligence combined with her strength."

•While *Marshall Rogers* had finished two issues of the *Steve Englehart*-written ***Dark Detective 3*** before he died, *Dan DiDio* said that DC "didn't feel right about publishing it, as Dark Detective was Steve Englehart and Marshall's story."

•DC plans to reconfigure and expand the Johnny DC line of all-ages titles, hinting that they may offer more than animated series versions of familiar DC characters.

•Hallelujah! A reprint of classic *Sheldon Mayer* ***Sugar & Spike*** stories is in the works, although it hasn't been determined yet if it'll be an ***Archives*** (color HC) or a ***Showcase*** (B&W TP) volume.

•*Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa & Adam Pollina* spotlight Warren Worthington in the five-issue ***Angel: Revelations*** miniseries.

•Marvel will follow up the ***Spider-Man: One More Day*** story arc by *J. Michael Straczynski & Joe Quesada* with "Brand New day. According to Quesada, "part of 'Brand New Day' will be building a supporting cast around Peter," adding that it'll be some old and a lot of new.

•*Brian Bendis & Jackson Guice* are working on ***Ultimate Origin***, a book that reveals how the Ultimate Marvelverse came to be. "A few months ago, they asked if I would write all the ***Ultimate Annuals*** to develop some new stuff, and I had a lot of new stuff I wanted to put in. But when we were at the retreat, I said, 'You know, we've been holding on to this story, the big deliver-the-goods-story for so long, I asked if I could do that first... *Jeph Loeb* has a story coming up that is very reliant on this information being unveiled, publicly, so we came up with a plan where I would unveil the origin of the Ultimate Universe, which includes information you've never seen about Nick Fury, Captain America, the mutant population, Wolverine, Charles Xavier, Magneto – every major player – the connections between Reed Richards and Peter Parker's parents, connections between Captain America's origin, and the other origins that involved the Super Soldier Serum, not to mention where the Super Soldier Serum came from…all of these things will be revealed in this miniseries. Not hinted at, not in that ***X-Files*** way where they promise that things will be revealed when they never have any intent to reveal anything – they're really being *revealed* here... The reveal will show why these things in the Ultimate Universe aren't close to the Marvel Universe…" Bendis sees the story as "springboarding us to a new level of what's special about the Ultimate Universe."

Avengers Are in the House

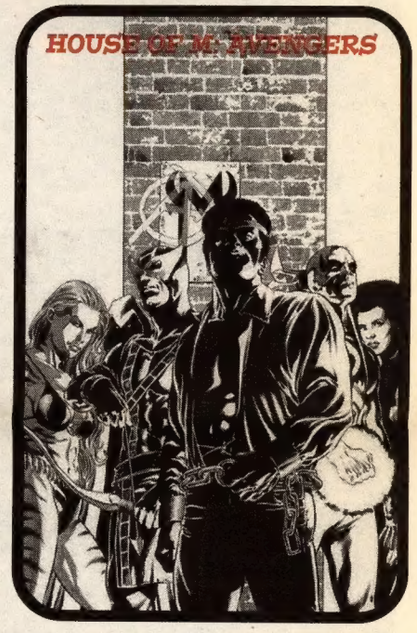
Sure, ***House of M*** occurred almost two years ago—but there are *still* some stories to be told... and writer *Christos Gage*, along with artist *Mike Perkins*, is going to tell one of those tales in the upcoming ***House of M: Avengers*** miniseries, which focuses on the Avengers in a world ruled by the Scarlet Witch's whims.

Gage told ***Comic Shop Newsarama's*** *Matt Brady* how he became involved in the project. "*Bill Rosemann* called me up and said Marvel had asked him to edit a new ***House of M*** miniseries, and he was interested in doing one called ***House of M: Avengers*** that focused on Luke Cage and his band of resistance fighters. The characters—Cage, Iron Fist, Hawkeye, Misty Knight, the Sons of the Tiger, etc.—were all ones I really liked, so I jumped at the chance...even more so when he said he had my old ***Union Jack*** partner *Mike Perkins* in mind to do the art!"

Part of the appeal for Gage is that these characters "are not cosmic powerhouses, they're more like regular folks. They also embody the classic Marvel paradigm of 'heroes with problems'... Cage was an ex-con from the ghetto, Iron Fist an orphan, Hawkeye started as a criminal, etc."

Gage explained who these Avengers are. "In this miniseries, 'Avengers' is the name given to Luke Cage and his allies, who are both an outlaw organization and a band of resistance fighters who defy the rule of Magneto and the mutant power structure to make sure humans, or 'sapiens,' get justice when they can't get it anywhere else.

"And before anyone brings it up, we are fully aware that Luke says to Wolverine 'What's an Avenger?' in the core ***House of M*** mini. We're going to establish that 'the Avengers' is like the Mafia in that its members deny its existence. 'What's an Avenger?' is kind of like saying 'Mafia? Cosa Nostra? This is fiction!'"



"This miniseries will not take place in the same time period as the other ***House of M*** books. Instead, we'll go back to the end of the human/mutant wars, which is around when Luke got his powers, and see how he went from escaped convict to crime boss to leader of a group of freedom fighters. It'll cover over twenty years, as our backdrop shows how the world changed while mutants came to power and humans became the minority..."

While the series takes place in an alternate reality, it's a reality that has its own continuity, which Gage must respect. "Everything has to fit with what's been established in the existing ***House of M*** books, so I can't decide that Captain America was elected president in 1980, for example, because we already saw how his life played out. But beyond that I can do whatever I want, subject to editorial approval. For characters like Tigra, who weren't mentioned in other ***HoM*** books, it's carte blanche.

"The mutant task force assigned to take Cage down includes Taskmaster, the Blob, Thunderbird, and a token sapien...Frank Castle, code-named The Punisher. In the HoM world, like many other characters, the Punisher got his fondest wish...he saved his family. But, also like other characters, it wasn't quite 'happily ever after.' If Frank starts to have misgivings about his partners, now he's got a family they can use to get leverage over him..."

If ***House of M: Avengers*** is well received, "I wouldn't mind returning to the House of M world if the interest exists among the readers and there are cool stories still to be told, which I think there are," Gage said.

Continued on page 6

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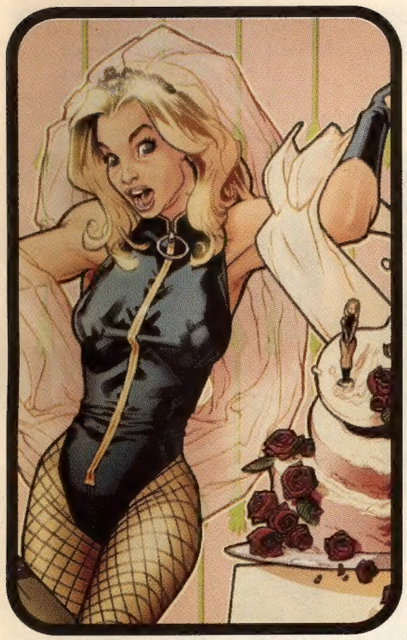


Coming Comics— DC in September

DC gets ready to celebrate some nuptials this fall, beginning with ***The Black Canary Wedding Planner*** by *J. Torres, Lee Ferguson, Christine Norrie, & Karl Story*, which follows Dinah,Ollie, and Oracle as they plan the wedding of the year. From there, the story continues into *Dwayne McDuffie, Mike McKone, & Andy Lanning's* ***JLA Wedding Special***, which throws a kink into the festivities in the persons of the new Injustice League. But even these baddies can't stop this marriage, as readers discover in ***The Green Arrow/Black Canary Wedding Special*** by *Judd Winick, Amanda Conner, & Jimmy Palmiotti*, in which readers will see why the Black Canary's acceptance of Green Arrow's proposal may have been the biggest mistake for both of them!

From the pages of the ***JLA Wedding Special***, new series writer *Dwayne McDuffie* —along with artists *Joe Benitez & Victor Llamas*—continues the saga of the Injustice League in ***Justice League of America #13***, in which a hero is severely beaten by the new Injustice League, forcing the JLA to fight back!

Can it be true? DC is confident that, a mere two months after the release of the sixth issue, *Frank Miller, Jim Lee, & Scott Williams* will entertain readers with ***All Star Batman & Robin, The Boy Wonder #7***, which reveals the mastermind behind the Flying Graysons' murder. Look for it in mid-September... we hope!

In order to save the world's greatest heroes, Booster Gold travels into the past to team up with the egomaniacal Sinestro in ***Booster Gold #2*** by *Geoff Johns, Jeff Katz, Dan Jurgens, & Norm Rapmund*. But what does Dan Garret have to do with any of this?...

Countdown continues with four more weekly issues in September, courtesy of *Paul Dini, Keith Giffen*, and an elite group of writers and artists. Karate Kid battles Equus! Jimmy Olsen visits Infinity Inc. for answers! Mary Marvel falls under the spell of Eclipso! Kyle Rayner joins the Challengers from Beyond! Piper and Trickster encounter the villainy of Poison Ivy and Deathstroke! Plus, Black Canary's bachelorette party!

DC explores the darker corners of the DC Universe in ***Countdown to Mystery***, a 48-page anthology book featuring *Steve Gerber & Justiniano's* Dr. Fate, along with a second story focusing on the temptress Eclipso, courtesy of *Matt Sturges & Stephen Segovia*.

Ron Marz & Paco Herrera send Kyle Rayner, Donna Toy, and Jason Todd—aka the Challengers of the Beyond— across the 52 worlds of the Multiverse in search of the former Atom in ***Countdown Presents the Search for Ray Palmer: WildStorm***. Their search for Palmer takes them to the WildStorm Universe, where they come face-to-face with Wildstorm's finest, including The Authority and Gen13.

The Flash returns with #231, picking up one issue number after the 2006 series' finale—but it's the return of writer *Mark Waid*, and the identity of the Scarlet Speedster whose exploits he'll be chronicling, that'll have everyone talking. (For more info, check out the feature story in this issue of ***CSN***.)

From the twisted mind of Lex Luthor —ably assisted by creators *Peter Milligan & Max Fiumara*—comes the ***52*** spin-off that will change everything you know about the members of ***Infinity Inc.*** A year after John Henry Irons appeared to bring Luthor's Everyman project to a close, the story of ***Infinity Inc.*** continues, beginning with a look at the troubled lives of Starlight, Fury, and Nuklon.

Geoff Johns, Dale Eaglesham, & Ruy Jose present a prologue to the JSA's next major story arc in ***Justice Society #9***. In this issue, a fight between Wildcat and Wildcat; a firehouse pancake breakfast; Power Girl's quest to unlock the secret's behind her cousin's death; Citizen Steel's new family and the fate of Starman!

The Martian Manhunter is the central figure of "Ghosts of Mars," a story arc by *Justin Gray, Rick Leonardi, & Sean Phillips* that kicks off in ***JLA Classified #42***.

Garth Ennis & John McCrea bring back their anti-hero Tommy Monaghan in the two-part ***JLA/Hitman*** prestige-format miniseries. There's a problem on the JLA moonbase, and not even the World's Greatest Heroes can cope by themselves. Can Tommy help them out... and will he?

Meet the future ring wielder Teen Lantern in ***The Legion of Super-Heroes in the 31st Century #6***.

A new era dawns in ***Outsiders #50***, the final issue of the current series. Batman makes a stunning last-minute change to the Outsiders' new roster — but there's a bigger surprise in store as the team uncovers a worldwide upheaval within the supervillain community.

In ***Suicide Squad: Raise the Flag***, *John Ostrander, Javier Pina, & Robin Riggs* reveal how original Suicide Squad member Rick Flag Jr. survived a nuclear blast to play a role in the re-formation of the team. The eight-issue miniseries, which spins off from events in recent issues of ***Checkmate***, marks Ostrander's return to the series he so capably wrote in the late 80's and early 90's.

Tony Bedard & Bernard Chang present an ***Countdown*** tie-in in ***Supergirl #21***, in which Supergirl faces off against the Karate Kid.

Kurt Busiek, Carlos Pacheco, & Jesus Merino kick off the two-part finale of "Camelot Falls" in ***Superman #667***. With the whole world watching, Superman's on the hunt for Arion. But Subjekt-17 stands in his path — and he's out for blood!

Ron Marz, the writer who introduced Kyle Rayner, explores the cause of Kyle's downfall and the nature of the Parallax entity in ***Tales of The Sinestro Corps Presents Parallax #1***, the first in a series of specials focusing on members of the Sinestro Corps and tying into the "Sinestro Corps War" crossover!

The Titans of Tomorrow pay a visit to today in ***Teen Titans #51*** by *Sean McKeever, Ale Garza, & Marlo Alquiza*. The super-popular future Titans are arrive in our present time , and they've already taken out the Justice League. What crucial historical event are they here to stop — or contribute to?

Back by popular demand, it's ***Uncle Sam & the Freedom Fighters!*** *Justin Gray & Jimmy Palmiotti* are joined by artist *Renato Arlem* for this series that spins out of ***Amazons Attack***. Uncle Sam finds himself faced with a changing world and a country torn to pieces. How will he and his Freedom Fighters fit in as part of this new world order?

Cassie Sandsmark graduates to her own miniseries in ***Wonder Girl***, courtesy of *J. Torres, Sanford Greene, & Nathan Massengill*. (See the feature article in this issue of ***CSN*** for more information.)

At long last, *Allan Heinberg* has finished his script for his ***Wonder Woman*** arc, *Terry & Rachel Dodson* have illustrated it, and fans can read the finale in ***Wonder Woman Annual #1***. And if the return of Allan Heinberg and Terry Dodson isn't enough, there's also an all-new backup by Heinberg and the upcoming art team of ***Action Comics*** *Gary Frank & Jonathan Sibal*, featuring the secret origins of Wonder Woman, Donna Troy, Wonder Girl, Sarge Steel and Nemesis.

Coming Comics— CMX/DC in October

Kanako Inuki's ***Presents Volume One***, a horror series by the creator known as "the queen of horror in Japan, is the first release in CMX's new, larger, mature readers format.

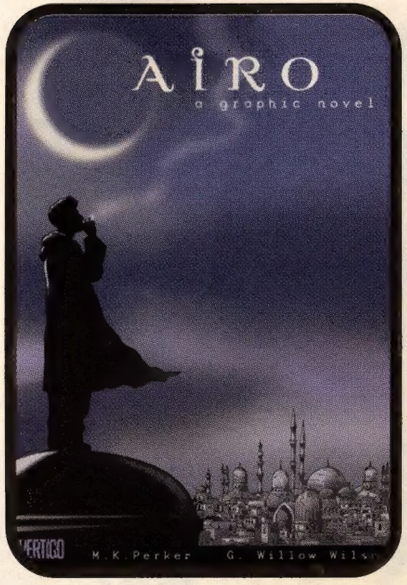
A murderous entity controls the arm of an innocent girl in ***Variante***, a new horror/suspense series by *Iqura Sugimoto* presented in CMX's new, larger format.

Coming Comics— WildStorm/DC in September

The original Wetworks team is back together in ***Wetworks #13*** by *J.M. DeMatteis, Billy Dallas Payton, & Trevor Scott*... but it looks like event his team might not be enough, as the enhanced Night Tribes take over eastern Europe.

New tales of ***A Nightmare on Elm Street*** and ***The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*** are featured in ***New Line Cinema's Tales of Horror***, an anthology title that features two horror shorts in each issue.

Teenager Davie Falkner was born with a skull deformity that makes him the butt of nearly every joke. When his parents send him to camp, though, he learns that being different might be a lifesaver in ***Friday the 13th: How I Spent My Summer Vacation***.



Coming Comics—Vertigo in September

G. Willow Wilson, a Cairo-based journalist, is joined by artist *M.K. Perker* for the original graphic novel ***Cairo***, an action-adventure that brings the ancient and modern Middle East together with a Vertigo twist! A stolen hookah, a spiritual underworld, and a genie on the run change the lives of five strangers forever in this modern fable set on the streets of the Middle East's largest metropolis!

Coming from DC Direct in February 2008

DC Direct ventures into the "designer toy" vinyl market with ***Uni-Formz: Batman***, a decidedly different version of the Dark Knight produced by DC Direct and Monster 5.

The Justice League has its trophy room—and now you can have your very own version of that room, thanks to DC Direct's ***JLA Trophy Room Replica Series***, which kicks off with the ***Multi-Colored Kryptonite Replica Display***. Presented in a special protective case are the four primary forms: Red, Gold, Blue and Green Kryptonite. Each "meteorite" lights up and is permanently housed in the unique glass-domed JLA Trophy Room Display. This limited-edition collectible also includes the brochure "Guide to the Trophy Room" written by best-selling author and ***JLA*** scribe *Brad Meltzer*.

The ***Superman/Batman Action Figure Series*** continues with the release of ***Series 5: Vengeance 2***, based on designs by *Ed McGuinness*. This series features ***Supergirl, Power Girl, Batman/Superman,*** and ***The Joker & Mr. Mxyzptlk Two-Pack***.

Robin hits the big time with the release of the ***Robin 13" Deluxe Collector Figure***, the latest addition to DC's 1:6 scale line. This limited figure comes clothed in an authentically detailed fabric costume, includes a display stand and is packaged in a deluxe four-color window box with a fifth panel.

DC Unlimited offers another quartet of ***World of Warcraft Action Figures*** in February. This series includes ***Human Warrior Archilon Shadowheart, Troll Priest Zabra Hexx, Gnome Warrior Sprocket Gyrospring,*** and ***Night Elf Druid Broll Bearmantle***.

DC adds another pair of posters to its line: ***Batman All Star***, featuring the *Jim Lee-Scott Williams* cover art to ***All Star Batman #5***, and ***Nightwing: Reflections***, featuring *Ryan Sook's* cover art from ***Nightwing #133***.

Moore Good News for Spidey Loves Mary Jane Fans

Terry Moore, acclaimed creator of the recently-wrapped ***Strangers in Paradise*** (which, unlike ***The Sopranos***, actually had an ending—a great one, in fact!), has a new gig: he'll be writer of a relaunched ***Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane*** series that debuts later this year (artist TBA).

Moore explained how the deal cam about. "When I knew that I was getting close to the end of ***Strangers In Paradise***, I made a call over to Marvel and asked *Joe Quesada* if they had any projects for me, that I could do since I was going to have all this free time on my hands. And he came back and suggested this book. And I thought, 'Wow! Yeah! I like that!'

"I liked the fact that there's a title in the Spider-Man family that is approachable for new readers, and is accessible to younger kids and to girls. I think some of the more gritty, mainstream titles may be off-putting to new readers and parents of young teens. You need something like this to complete the line.

"And I have to confess, I found the whole aspect of it very charming, that it focused on the kids in school. What I liked about the original Spider-Man stories was that they really focused on Peter Parker and his friendships and his trials at home and in school, and oh yeah, he did this other thing too. So Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane is the closest thing to the original Spider-Man I've seen in years."

What ***Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane***, when Moore could have had his choice of plum assignments? "For me as a writer, and as a person, I am more interested in what it takes for people to wake up every morning and find their enthusiasm and get through the day. And I'm really interested in the personal battles that every person has, to be the best they can or to try to reach out and start a relationship or keep a relationship with somebody else who has their own hands full.

"And I think it's maybe never more confusing than when you're a teenager. So it's fascinating to go back and put your mind back in that place, and to put myself in the shoes of Peter Parker and Mary Jane, Liz, Flash and Harry. To just put myself in their place and see what it takes for them to get up every day and go to Midtown High in Queens and do the best they can. Of course, Peter has a special set of problems.

"But I found it fascinating as a writer. That's what I'm interested in. I care a lot more and am more interested in that than what the Secret Service is doing or World War Five or—you know," Moore said with a laugh.

Moore believes that fans of his ***Strangers in Paradise*** will find plenty to like in ***Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane*** "because I think easily half my readers on ***Strangers in Paradise*** were women. And of course, ***Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane*** has a focal point of Mary Jane. I see it as a very easy transition for me to go from writing about Francine, Katchoo and Casey to going and writing about Mary Jane and Liz."

Moore is also toying with another series concept. "It's in development. It's called ***Motorgirl*** for right now. That's the working title. But I don't have any announcements on it yet. It's just something I'm working on."

PREVIEWS

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ON THE COVER ...

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GREEN ARROW & BLACK CANARY WEDDING SPECIAL #1—Following Black Canary's response to Green Arrow's proposal in *Green Arrow #75*, see why her response may have been the biggest mistake for both of them in this landmark special issue from Judd Winick, Amanda Conner and Jimmy Palmiotti!

SPAWN: ARCHITECTS OF FEAR GN—Ethaan, one of the five Angels of the dreaded caste of the Architects, seeks the help of Hellspawn Al Simmons to restore one of their oldest and most secret of weapons, the Horseak-El, in this original graphic novel from writer Arthur Claire and artist Alek Briclot!

550+ pages of cool stuff that starts shipping in September!

CHECK OUT THESE OFFERINGS:

Lobster Johnson: The Iron Prometheus #1—With America on the verge of entering WWII, Johnson and his team fight their way through cannibals, yetis, and the machinations of a mysterious villain bent on fulfilling a deadly prophecy in this new mini-series from *Hellboy* creator Mike Mignola and artist Jason Armstrong!

Infinity Inc. #1—From the twisted mind of Lex Luthor comes the "52" spin-off that will change everything you know about the members of *Infinity Inc.*! Written by Peter Milligan and illustrated by Max Fiumara (*Black Gas*), *Infinity Inc.* #1 will take readers on a tortured trip to the dark side of the superhero dream!

The Mice Templar #1—When his family is taken captive into slavery, Karis is catapulted into an extraordinary adventure of magic and wonder, of faith and valor, and of one small mouse whose destiny may change the entire world, begins! Created by Bryan J.L. Glass (*Magician: Apprentice*) & Michael Avon Oeming (*Powers*)!

Marvel Comics Presents #1—Classic heroes! Top talent! All-new stories! Jump on board the landmark first issue of *Marvel Comics Presents*! Four — count 'em four — brand new stories with a landmark wrap-around cover by J. Scott Campbell!

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THE COUNTDOWN CONTINUES

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